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Thirteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 245th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 26 January 1994, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. NIKOLAEVA
(Vice-Chairperson)

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In the absence of the Chairperson, Ms. Nikolaeva (Vice-Chairperson), took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Second and third periodic reports of Barbados (CEDAW/C/BAR/2-3)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Alleyne and Mr. Maycock (Barbados) took places at the Committee table.

2. Ms. ALLEYNE said that, since its initial and first periodic reports, Barbados had experienced a decline in gross domestic product as a result of the global economic crisis. The structural adjustment programmes, which had been established had already met with some success, but the adjustment had not been entirely painless. Staff cuts in both the public and private sectors had contributed to an increase in unemployment, particularly among women. In order to reinvigorate the productive sectors of the economy and reduce unemployment, the Government had offered retraining for workers who had been laid off and incentives for the creation and development of new enterprises, particularly in the export sector.

3. Barbados had achieved a measure of equality of opportunity for boys and girls in its educational system. The majority of schools were co-educational and free education was available up to the post-secondary level. At the primary levels, all students pursued a common curriculum and there were no gender-related barriers or restrictions on the pursuit of particular courses in secondary school. However, a bias continued to exist in students' choice of subjects of study. Although comprehensive statistical information on drop-out rates was not available to date, she expected to be able to submit some with Barbados' next periodic report; currently the drop-out rate was higher for boys than for girls.

4. Reform of the legal system had been a major priority since 1976. Since the last reporting period, Barbados had passed legislation relating to, inter alia, the status of children, domestic violence, sexual offences, property and succession, employment conditions and domicile. In addition, it had ratified ILO Conventions Nos. 100, 111 and 122. Barbados' national machinery for the enforcement of anti-discrimination measures consisted of the Bureau of Women's Affairs, which functioned as part of a ministry having responsibility for labour and community development, and the National Advisory Council.

5. Information had been requested on the reaction of the public in general, and men in particular, to the legal and social progress achieved by women. The general public appeared to be reasonably comfortable with the progress made by women, although some people were having some difficulty in accepting change. The Government had been using a variety of strategies - radio call-in programmes, television panel discussions and feature articles in the print media on violence, gender equality, health and other issues - to raise the people's

consciousness regarding the changes. In addition, women's organizations had organized public discussions on problems relating to so-called backlash behaviour by men in response to government efforts to create complete equality between men and women socially and economically.

Article 2

6. In order to incorporate the provisions of the Convention into domestic law, legislation had been adopted on violence against women, sexual offences, citizenship and disparities in the treatment of public officers.

7. Concerning the national policy on women that was included in Barbados' 1988-1989 development plan, she said that the policy included, inter alia, measures to increase participation of women in decision-making; annual leadership training programmes for women; an annual women's health fair; an annual symposium on cancer prevention; and activities to promote employment of women and income-generating enterprises. In addition, in August 1990, laws had been amended in order to bring the leave entitlements of female civil servants and their spouses into line with those of their male colleagues. The main developments during the 1990-1993 period included a study of sexual stereotyping in school text books; a public education campaign prior to the enactment of new legislation on domestic violence and sexual offences; an amendment to Barbados' citizenship laws; and preparations for the World Conference on Women.

Article 5

8. The Government had recently enacted new legislation on domestic violence and orders of protection, which provided for the granting of restraining orders in cases of domestic violence. The new laws protected family members, including parties living together in unions other than marriage, from a variety of forms of physical and emotional harassment. A new law on sexual offences brought existing laws on rape, and other sexual offences against children, girls, boys and women up to date, imposing new penalties and consolidating other statutes already on the books. In addition, the Bureau of Women's Affairs was planning a training programme to sensitize police officers to the problem of family violence.

Article 6

9. Traffic in women continued to be illegal in Barbados, although prostitution itself was not a criminal offence. However, procuring a person to engage in prostitution was a crime punishable by a 15-year prison term. Also, the Sexual Offences Act of 1992 prohibited a number of activities associated with prostitution. In light of the HIV/AIDS problem, every attempt was being made to curb prostitution and, to that end, the Government of Barbados had established a National Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS, which was working together with the Ministry of Health to implement a broad public education campaign taking advantage of television, radio, dramatizations and panel discussions in a variety of public forums, including schools and women's organizations. Seminars and training programmes for medical personnel and teachers were also held on a

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regular basis. In addition, the Ministry of Health had established the post of Health Education Officer, who was responsible for staff training in schools, clinics and hospitals as well as for sex education in schools.

Article 7

10. There were no legal barriers to women's participation in political life since adult suffrage had been introduced in 1951; however, few women had been nominated for elective office. In the general election of January 1991, the candidates for seats in the House of Assembly had included 11 women, one of whom had been elected. Two women had been appointed to the Senate, bringing the total number of female Senators to six. In 1990, Barbados had appointed its first female Governor-General and in 1991, a woman had been appointed to a high judicial post. Women also held leadership positions in a number of non-governmental organizations at the local level. However, women were still a minority in various decision-making bodies outside of the fields of health and child care, although the representation of women on the Film Censorship Board and the Paramedical Professions Council had improved since 1992.

11. On the question of the relationship between the Bureau of Women's Affairs and other women's organizations in Barbados, she said that, as the national machinery for promoting Government efforts to eliminate discrimination against women, the Bureau was required to maintain close relations with other women's organizations.

Article 8

12. On the question of female representation in the diplomatic corps, she said that the Ambassador of Barbados in Caracas had returned home and had been replaced by another woman. In addition, a woman had been appointed to the post of Deputy Permanent Representative in Barbados' delegation to the United Nations. Female delegates had also represented Barbados at a number of international conferences.

Article 9

13. On the question of the right of a woman, under Barbadian law, to file for citizenship for her non-Barbadian spouse, she said an amendment to the Barbadian Citizenship Act was on the table to create just such a right. The proposed amendment would also address the question of transmission of citizenship by a married woman to her child.

Article 10

14. Access to vocational training in all areas was equally available to men and women, and efforts were being made to encourage girls and boys to choose non-traditional vocations, especially in areas of growing employment opportunity. With equal access to educational opportunities and free choice of professions, more women were engaged in the labour force and were entering traditionally male fields. Social science was offered at every stage of

education, but particularly at the third level. Human rights was taught as a component of the family life education syllabus. It was offered as an individual subject at university level, however. Three institutions provided specialized teacher training, and the majority of participants were women. Research facilities were available to all participants.

Article 11

15. Barbados had been a member of the International Labour Organization (ILO) since 1967 and had ratified the ILO Convention concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value and the Convention concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment. There was a guaranteed minimum wage for shop assistants and domestic employees and unemployment benefits were available.

16. Barbados had been required to implement a structural adjustment programme, which included retraining, measures to stimulate productivity, especially in exports, and incentives to encourage local productivity. No restrictions had been placed on women's participation in trade unions, and their representation at the decision-making level continued to improve. Women workers were entitled to benefits under the national insurance scheme, including maternity leave with pay, workers compensation, severance payments and free medical services. Public and private day care services were available. Public workers could also benefit from housing loan programmes and government rental housing.

Article 12

17. Regarding programmes for the early diagnosis and treatment of cancer, the Barbados Cancer Society, a non-governmental organization, was working with the Government on the early detection and treatment of cancer, with emphasis on public education. Students were encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles with a view to avoiding cancer and HIV/AIDS. The rates of breast and cervical cancers in women had decreased following public education and early detection campaigns. Plans for the future included a hospice and home nursing services for the terminally ill.

Article 13

18. Service organizations such as the Lions, the Jaycees and the Kiwanis had amalgamated their men's and women's branches, and women as well as men served in their leadership. In the case of the Bridgetown Club, a private organization, women were entitled to membership and took part in all social activities.

Article 16

19. No specific studies had been done to determine the reasons for the fluctuations in the number of divorces. Between 1989 and 1992 the incidence of divorce had decreased. Preliminary statistics indicated that more women than men were filing for divorce. The Family Law Act of 1981 stated that the family was the basic unit of society and must be respected as such. It sought to

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protect the family unit by mandating counselling before divorce proceedings, and provided for maintenance, custody of children and equitable distribution of matrimonial assets. Its provisions were similarly applied to parties in a de facto union, defined as "a union other than marriage". There were no limits on the rights of women to choose a spouse, and monogamy was the legal form of marriage.

20. Ms. OUEDRAOGO congratulated the Government of Barbados on its outstanding efforts in education. Equal educational opportunity was key to the advancement of women and provided them with the means to reach decision-making levels.

21. It would be interesting to learn more about the "male backlash" to which the representative of Barbados had referred, and wondered if men had been involved in the planning of Government efforts to promote equality between the sexes. It would also be interesting to learn more about the specific functions of the National Advisory Council on Women, whether it was intended to be a focal point for coordination at the national level or a technical department dealing with the advancement of women.

22. Ms. AYKOR inquired about the reason for the high divorce rate and the large percentage of households headed by women. She would be interested to know how children's surnames were treated after divorce.

23. Ms. SCHOPP-SCHILLING congratulated Barbados on its active policy to promote women, especially its efforts to counteract the negative impact of the structural adjustment programme on women. It was to be commended for seeking international assistance and acting to improve its legislation where women were concerned. It would be useful to learn the reasons for the rising birth rate and whether the Government was implementing any population control programmes.

24. Concerning prostitution, she wondered whether any sex tourism was occurring, in view of the importance of tourism to the economy and the high unemployment rate.

25. With regard to women in political life, the Government should be encouraged to increase the number of women in Parliament or named to government posts through a quota system or new nomination procedures. Concerning education, additional information would be welcomed on any existing women's studies programmes and on teacher training regarding sex stereotyping in their interaction with students.

26. Turning to article 11, she asked if ILO Conventions became part of domestic national law upon ratification or if they must be translated into law. It would be interesting to know whether any equal pay cases had arisen and whether any affirmative action plans existed in the public or private sectors.

27. Ms. BRAVO de RAMSEY said that she would be interested to learn what kind of Government support, whether economic or logistical, was provided for the efforts of non-governmental women's organizations. More information was needed on the Domestic Violence and the Sexual Offences Acts. With regard to article 4, the

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specific content of the programme for women which was to be included in the National Development Plan should be provided, as well as the results of the previous five-year plan. Statistics on the numbers of women involved in prostitution and whether they were increasing or decreasing would be useful in the analysis of the implementation of article 6 for the next report.

28. Ms. MAKINEN requested further information regarding men's family and child care responsibilities. Concerning the Government's plans to encourage women's participation in politics, she asked whether female candidates received the same level of funding from political parties as male candidates.

29. Ms. CARTWRIGHT inquired whether the legislation referred to in the second and third periodic reports of Barbados had brought national laws into compliance with the Convention and suggested that the next report should evaluate improvements in the status of women and indicate what obstacles remained to be overcome. She would also appreciate information on the extent of cooperation and consultation with non-governmental organizations in the preparation of the reports.

30. Ms. LIN Shangzhen commended the efforts by the Barbadian Government to promote education as a precondition for enhancing the status of women and inquired whether additional measures were envisaged to enable girls to enter non-traditional occupations and rise to decision-making levels.

31. Ms. KHAN said that normally the existence of a large tourist industry and a social system that sanctioned unofficial marriage arrangements were likely to promote prostitution and the exploitation of women. She inquired how the Government had concluded that there was no link between prostitution and the expansion of the tourist industry in Barbados. The reporting State should also indicate whether, under Barbadian law, a legally married man could maintain a relationship with another woman or whether that would be considered polygamy.

32. Ms. AOUIJ said that the government investments in the field of education and health had yielded encouraging results for women and girls. The fields of politics and economics, however, seemed to attract fewer women. The Bureau of Women's Affairs should take measures to increase women's awareness of the need to participate effectively in those fields and be placed in decision-making posts. Further, information should be provided on the reasons for the increasing rate of divorce cases initiated by men. She inquired whether the applicable legislation provided for reconciliation procedure and, if so, what results had been achieved. The reporting State should also provide information on the number of women judges appointed to deal with such cases.

33. Ms. UKEJE said that there had been a noticeable improvement in the situation of women since the submission of the initial report by Barbados. The reporting State had enacted legislation to address the question of violence against women and she hoped that it would be vigorously enforced. The next report should indicate how women's issues were being incorporated into development plans and what steps were being taken to increase the number of women in decision-making positions.

34. Ms. ALLEYNE (Barbados) said that her Government had used a variety of approaches to promote the integration of women at all levels. The Barbadian Commission on the Status of Women, established in 1976 and composed of both women and men, had put forward a large number of recommendations aimed at eliminating inequalities in all sectors. Since 1976, the Bureau of Women's Affairs, serving as the secretariat for the Commission, had been working with development partners and women's organizations to implement those recommendations. The Bureau, which was a very small unit, had requested the various government departments and agencies concerned to implement the Commission's recommendations and report back to it on progress made in improving the status of women. The Bureau had invited women's organizations, non-governmental organizations, government agencies and the media to provide it with updated information on action taken in that regard. On the basis of the information provided and other sectoral reports, the Bureau had drawn up the reports to CEDAW in accordance with its guidelines. Those reports had then been publicized through the media.

35. The Bureau was a technical agency of the Government and served as the secretariat for the National Advisory Council on Women. Through the Bureau, the Council provided the Government with up-to-date information on the needs and concerns of women as a channel for direct feedback from the community. The Bureau also brought the concerns of the Advisory Council to the attention of the Cabinet and Parliament, when necessary.

36. Over the past 17 years, the Bureau had conducted a variety of activities - seminars, conferences, public discussions, media interviews and published feature articles to enhance the awareness of women and men about the situation of women and find out their concerns. The efforts to integrate women were generally well received by both women and men. Nevertheless, whenever social change took place, some negative reaction could be expected. Accordingly, the Bureau had tried to include in discussions the views of persons who had a negative reaction to the integration of women and had sought to address the concerns of men who might have anxiety with regard to the advancement of women.

37. In its development plan, the Bureau had conducted research to obtain data from various sectors in order to prepare its reports to the Committee. In preparing its report for the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Bureau was compiling information on the impact of structural adjustment on women and collecting comparative data on single parenting by women and men.

38. With regard to public education, the Bureau had begun a six-month programme on violence and had run a weekly series for about four months focusing on community involvement in measures to cope with the economic crisis. The community had been encouraged to share its ideas and suggestions on employment opportunities and income generation. Barbadian women tended to gain skills in a variety of areas and use them in income-generating activities during difficult economic periods. The Bureau had been helping women to find available resources for income generation and had organized three workshops in 1993 for approximately 60 women for that purpose. Together with the National Advisory Council, the Barbados Community College and other institutes and business organizations, the Bureau was preparing activities within the context of

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International Women's Day to promote women's entrepreneurial skills and draw attention to their products and services as part of a marketing strategy.

39. The Bureau had also instituted a leadership training programme to enhance leadership skills among women, enabling them to prepare, implement and monitor projects and gain access to funding. In collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank, the Bureau was developing a project in order to be able to offer financial and technical assistance through a revolving fund to organizations that focused on production or income generation or addressed particular social needs. With regard to overall improvement of the status of women, the Bureau had a good working relationship with other governmental organizations and agencies. In its development plan for 1988-1993, it had proposed the establishment of an inter-ministerial committee to ensure coordination whenever possible. While there was no quota system in Barbados to ensure participation of women on boards or committees or in the political field, the Government did have a policy for integrating women; however, much work remained to be done in that regard. The Bureau had begun preparation of a directory of qualified persons which would be made available to agencies and ministries.

40. Mr. MAYCOCK (Barbados) said that, while the vast majority of people in his country were of African descent, and while African customs and traditions remained strong, the influence of the North American and European way of life was also felt; that might account for the high divorce rate.

41. The question of the negative reaction on the part of some men to the progress made by women was not straightforward. The educational system in his country had traditionally been based on the British system; coeducation had been introduced rather abruptly, and the Minister of Education at the time had not deemed it necessary to prepare the country for such a change. Consequently, when girls had begun attending some elite schools which had formerly been reserved for boys, some male students had objected. Women now accounted for the majority of teachers and that, too, was resented by some male students. Such problems could be solved only over a long period of time.

42. With regard to the low level of participation by women in politics, women accounted for 52 per cent of the population, and were also responsible for most of the work of organizing the political parties. Accordingly, he took it that if women wanted greater representation in Parliament, they would get it. Nevertheless, his Government was aware of the issue and was committed to achieving gender equality.

43. He was not aware of any organized link between tourism and prostitution. It would be extremely difficult to estimate the number of women engaging in prostitution.

44. International conventions ratified by his country did not automatically become part of its domestic law unless special legislation was adopted. That

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had been done in respect of both the ILO Conventions and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

45. Polygamy was not tolerated in his country. Legal marriage took precedence over all other unions; however, the children produced by such unions were protected in terms of their rights of succession.

46. Lastly, all candidates for political office were entitled to the same level of support from the Government. All candidates were required to make a deposit which was refunded if they received a certain percentage of the vote.

47. Ms. ALLEYNE said that 44 per cent of households in her country were headed by women, including widowed, divorced and never-married women. Furthermore, 48.5 per cent of the workforce was female. Her Government had acknowledged the high employment rate among women by providing child care and upgrading family services. There were approximately 700 children in 14 Government-sponsored day-care centres, and over 1,200 children in 44 private centres. Family legislation ensured that women and children were provided for in cases where women were heads of households, and fathers were expected to contribute to their children's maintenance. If, for any reason, custody of the children was granted to the father, and the mother had an income, then the same law applied to her.

48. The rate of population increase had been low over the past 30 years because of the success of the family-planning programme and the possibility of migration. However, as migration had slowed in the past 15 years, the population could be expected to grow.

49. With regard to teacher training and sex-role stereotyping, a Centre for Gender Training had been established at all branches of the University of the West Indies. The Centre had been in operation for 10 years and had significant increased awareness among university graduates, both male and female, of the role played by women in development. In addition, a project to review textbooks so as to eliminate sex-role stereotyping had been carried out three years earlier with the participation of national education officers.

50. With regard to the question of women's participation in politics, part of the difficulty stemmed from the fact that women viewed their role as supportive rather than active. Women's organizations, in collaboration with the national machinery, must help women to examine their goals and to work out their strategies.

51. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed the fact that the Government had ratified the Convention without reservations and expressed the hope that it would increase its efforts to promote equal opportunity for women, despite the economic difficulties facing Barbados. In addition, women themselves must take the initiative to increase their participation in the public arena.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.